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Recently declassified documents and other materials make reexamination of the Truman administration national security planning apparatus a valuable example of policy formation in crises. The arguments formed and advanced in the present strategic debate are strikingly similar to those offered in the debate on NSC-68, the first major official American policy planning document of the cold war.*

DEPARTURE FROM INCREMENTALISM IN U.S. STRATEGIC PLANNING: THE ORIGINS OF NSC-68

by
Sam Postbrief

Decisionmaking Analyses. Decisionmaking studies of United States' attempts at forging world order following World War II too frequently appear as demongraphy or hagiography and it is not difficult to see why this is so. For "realist" historians and political scientists, the heart of international politics is unquestionably the actions and reactions of individuals in history, together with estimations of national capabilities and interests. When the individuals have the personalities (or are imputed to have such features) of a Roosevelt, a Truman, a Churchill, or a Stalin, it is understandable that perceptions of historical events are weighted very heavily by estimates of personality traits and actions of leading figures and their subordinates. The recent spate of "psychohistories," a genre whose modern contributors include Harold Lasswell, William Bullitt, Nathan Leites, Arnold Rogow, Michael Rogin [Jackson], Fawn Brodie, William Langer, and William Abrahamson [Nixon], to name but a few, affirm the continuing popularity of this mode of "political" explanation. In the case of the formulation and implementation of postwar American foreign policy, certain structural features seem to lend credence to personalist accounts of public policy. The close of the Second World War and the years immediately following saw in the United States no anonymous, bloated foreign policy bureaucracy absorbing the attention and energies of innocent elected officials.[1] U.S. national security policy machinery was then in its infancy, a product of the 1947 and 1949 defense reorganization acts which, among other innovations, gave life to the Central Intelligence Agency, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the National Security Council. George F. Kennan, at the direction of Secretary of State George Marshall (he as well a

*See "NSC-68: A Report to the National Security Council," *Naval War College Review*, May-June 1975, p. 51.

figure of mythical proportions in the public mind) set up the Policy Planning Staff in the State Department on 1 May 1947. The newly formed National Military Establishment experienced internecine warfare of almost mind-boggling scope and variety in the 5 years between the close of World War II and the beginning of the Korean war,[2] while admittedly dealing with new and very complex issues. The "great decisions" of the period were popularly perceived to be those arrived at by "great men," aided, to be sure, by influential subordinates, but primarily a testament to the personalities and intentions of the individual leaders.

An alternative analytic tradition, of somewhat more recent vintage, attempts to mount a paternity suit with regard to the actual origins of the major foreign policy decisions of the postwar period. This "bureaucratic politics" school stresses the influence of the numerous formal and informal institutional constraints that limit the discretion of public officials, constraints occasionally so significant that it may seem wholly inaccurate and seriously misleading to claim that elected officials actually "decide"—freely, and after explicit attention to and weighing of a set of objectively presented complex policy alternatives—any particular issue of even modest significance, much less something on the order of a policy of containment, the construction of a European Recovery Program, or the production of the hydrogen bomb. Such policies are produced, if not by inadvertence (the "quagmire myth" when they fail), then by the heaving and hauling of bureaucratic bargaining within the confines of the major Cabinet departments and associated executive "advisory" offices (e.g., the National Security Council, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Council of Economic Advisors), who in turn are buffeted by countless small, but cumulatively great, pressures from public and private sources. The "task environments" of each of the members of the foreign policy bureaucracy are extremely complex, and extremely unforgiving of error and miscalculation by individual institutions and offices comprising the foreign policy establishment.[3]

Neither of these approaches seems intellectually compelling standing alone. Both have significant *prima facie* appeal for those concerned with constructing a convincing account of postwar American foreign policy. Between Schlesinger's conviction of the "madness of Stalin," and Kennan's that Stalin was "entirely rational in his external policies," must lie the truth.[4] Similarly, as Amos Perlmutter has argued, the bureaucratic politics approach "should lead serious theorists to infer the existence of inherent and actual disproportions of power between the President and his advisors."[5] The fact that much of the bureaucratic politics literature appears innocent of such recognition, that it attempts to minimize the personal significance of leading public officials, forces it to discount much valuable information, and consequently lessens the soundness of its analysis.[6]

Common sense and a minimum degree of risk aversion dictate that a more persuasive analysis must fall between the two principal analytic schemes, drawing on the strengths of both, and withdrawing assent from one or the other when it becomes clear that the marginal value of adhering to its directions rapidly declines past a certain subjectively identified point. This analysis of the origins of NSC-68 will attempt to tread such a path, using all the while a set of motivational and informational assumptions currently out of favor among most contributors to the bureaucratic politics school. It adopts a "rational bias" recommended recently by George Quester in his valuable book *Nuclear Diplomacy*. Quester suggests good reasons for believing that what

public officials and their subordinates argued among themselves in their foreign policy deliberations in the postwar period accurately reflected their actual beliefs, absent circumstances in which dissembling proved for them tactically more advantageous. Quester continues:

> To assume that statesmen were more intelligent than they have seemed may appear a somewhat radical or perverse approach to any area of social science. Yet a straightforward defense for this assumption might argue as follows. Statesmen will often find it to their interest to pretend to be what they are not; to feign nonexistent ignorance is easier than to feign nonexistent intelligence; hence statesmen will generally seem more ignorant than they are. A second argument would be that we can indeed account for one major persistent error amongst strategists, namely, underrating the intelligence of other strategists. Adhering to the earlier stipulation that all serious miscalculation must be explainable, one would have to cite the ego-gratifying benefits for an intellectual of the "out" party in believing that the "ins" are simply stupid. Indeed, it may seem to the reader at points that the only error repeatedly identified in this account is one man's assumption that another has made erroneous assumptions.[7]

Such an account of the decisionmaking capabilities of leading participants in a variety of strategic deliberations need not deny that the individuals were subject to bounded rationality, and that they occasionally succumbed to the blandishments of "groupthink"[8] or other cognitive dissonance reduction mechanisms. But examination of an increasingly rich public documentary record leaves little ground for belittling the strategic deliberations of the principal participants in the construction of American foreign policy in the 1945-50 period. This is not to say that errors were not made or identified, that opportunities were not missed, nor that the quality of such deliberations as did take place might not have been improved. It is rather to urge that when different individuals, viewing the "same" evidence, reach markedly different conclusions regarding the implications of that evidence, one cannot with certainty impute "intelligence" to one group and "stupidity" to another. Vindication by events, acquittal by history, often constitute lessons fallibly drawn. This is offered to chasten judgment, not to chill inquiry.

While this study uses the "rational bias" proposed by Quester, care must be taken to avoid a number of uncommonly seductive fallacies to which writers in the bureaucratic politics-rational choice literature may be prone. The fallacy of division warns that properties associated with a group are not automatically just those associated with each and every member of the group. Thus if we come to claim that the decisionmaking process that generated NSC-68 was (or was not) characterized by a high degree of rationality, this does not entitle us to conclude that each of the participants in that process can equally thus be characterized. The fallacy of composition warns against the converse deduction, i.e., if we attribute (or do not attribute) a high degree of rationality to each of the participants in the decisionmaking process, it need not follow that the process itself be so described. Finally we may identify what I shall call the fallacy of connectedness. This asserts, following the present examples, that deficiency in one of the components of a system will necessarily taint or impair the performance of the whole. This implies that system components are tightly coupled, serially interconnected, and nonredundant—none of which may be the case. A variety of

error suppression mechanisms can be and routinely are built into political, social, economic, military, as well as mechanical systems.[9]

The most complete account of the origins and contents of NSC-68 prior to the publication of the document in 1975 is Paul Hammond's "NSC-68: Prologue to Rearmament,"[10] published in 1962. Hammond's study stands up remarkably well 18 years later, a tribute to the diligence and care with which he pursued the evidence available to him then, the most important of which was extensive interview data from participants in the drafting of NSC-68. Documentary evidence available only in the last 3 years permits a more thorough reconstruction of the decisionmaking process that generated NSC-68, its four supplements (NSC-68/1-4, 21 and 30 September; 8 and 14 December 1950), and related strategic analyses of the Hiroshima-Korea interregnum. Hammond correctly concludes that the production of NSC-68 was a much more "rational" process than that generating the FY 1950 defense budget: "The fiscal 1950 defense budget was never expressed in terms of the strategies which it was intended to support, nor were alternative strategies and their costs described . . . [NSC-68] stated general premises and it examined general alternative courses of action, selecting among them the one most strongly supported by the analysis."[11] As such it was a model for all subsequent strategic analyses, including the 1957 Gaither Report and most recently PRM-10. NSC-68 was an exercise in nonincremental policymaking designed, in Dean Acheson's words, "to so bludgeon the mass mind of 'top government' that not only could the President make a decision but that the decision could be carried out."[12]

Postwar Foreign Policy. It was clear that the United States, following the collapse of Germany and Japan, was from then on to bear a major burden in fashioning a structure of world order threatened by what Gabriel Almond called in 1950 "a universalist, dogmatic-absolutist, monolithic Soviet Union."[13] A posture of "rational interventionism," Almond continued—"foreign policies based on unambiguous efforts to foster the American and Western value system in the face of Soviet attacks"—seemed the sensible and ineluctable response of American national security policymakers.[14] The problem throughout the immediate postwar period lay just in the likelihood that U.S. responses to Soviet initiatives in Europe and Asia would be appropriately designed to thwart these expected Soviet thrusts by all measures short of, but not excluding, direct American military engagement with Soviet, East European, and Chinese forces.

To this end the series of American responses beginning, perhaps, with U.S.-Soviet Union negotiations concerning German reparations, and demands in 1946 for Soviet withdrawal from Iran, begged for a logically argued, factually buttressed, and popularly supported foreign policy program requiring an explicit commitment of substantial national resources as well as an executive positioned and willing to act decisively in particular situations demanding rapid response. That the Truman Doctrine, and even the Marshall Plan, were not such programs became abundantly clear to foreign policy planners in the following 3 years. Much as Stalin's alarming February 1946 speech fell considerably short of what Justice Douglas and many others construed as a "declaration of World War Three," so the hastily drafted Truman address was itself a measured, though major, response to a specific international crisis[15]—a response in which, as in the Czech and Berlin crises of the following year, the United States exercised considerable restraint in the face of what was perceived to be substantial provocation.

The 1946-49 period was thus characterized by a series of ad hoc strategic analyses of American foreign policy, each in response to a particular perceived crisis of Soviet inspiration if not manufacture, most too late and too ambiguous to guide administration budget and defense planners, and none sufficiently compelling or authoritative to enlist the unqualified support of all the principal bureaucratic and congressional participants in their design. Some were made public (the Truman Doctrine, Kennan's "X" article, congressional debates on the Marshall Plan, the MDAP, the Navy-Air Force battles over strategic forces and weapons systems, China, Berlin) but others were concealed from public scrutiny and debate for some time (Kennan's 1946 "long telegram," Clark Clifford's memo to President Truman, discussions before and the report of the General Advisory Committee of the Atomic Energy Commission, and a string of formal analyses culminating in the NSC-68 series).

The Order for NSC-68. On 19 November 1949, 2 months after he reported the first detection of a Soviet atomic bomb test, President Truman charged a Special Committee of the National Security Council (Secretary of State Dean Acheson, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, and Atomic Energy Commission Chairman David Lilienthal) with the responsibility for making recommendations

> a. as to whether and in what manner the United States should undertake the development and possible production of "super" atomic weapons, and
>
> b. as to whether and why any publicity should be given to this matter.

The report of the Special Committee, transmitted to the President 31 January 1950 contained the following three recommendations:[16]

> a. That the President direct the Atomic Energy Commission to proceed to determine the technical feasibility of a thermonuclear weapon, the scale and rate of effort to be determined jointly by the Atomic Energy Commission and the Department of Defense; and that the necessary ordnance and carrier program be undertaken concurrently;
>
> b. That the President direct the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense to undertake a reexamination of our objectives on our strategic plans, in the light of the probable fission bomb capability and possible thermonuclear bomb capability of the Soviet Union;
>
> c. That the President indicate publicly the intention of this Government to continue work to determine the feasibility of a thermonuclear weapon, and that no further official information on it be made public without the approval of the President.

The same day President Truman issued a letter to the Secretary of State implementing the recommendations of the Special Committee Report.[17] In particular, Secretary Acheson instructed Paul Nitze, the newly appointed Director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, to cooperate with designated representatives of the Secretary of Defense in implementing the second recommendation of the Special Committee, i.e., to prepare for the National Security Council, and for the President, a study of the United States' strategic position in the aftermath of the Soviet attainment of nuclear capability, and the fall of China to the Communists. Nitze, who represented Acheson at most of the meetings of the Special Committee, succeeded, with Lilienthal, in

urging the incorporation of the second recommendation in the Committee's report. Drafts of the study were circulated to limited numbers of senior Government officials for comment from mid-February through the first week of April 1950. The completed study, "A Report to the National Security Council on United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," dated 14 April 1950, was given the file number NSC-68. Between April 1950 and December 1950, four revisions of NSC-68 were completed and made part of the NSC-68 series.

Organization of the Study Group.

State Department. From the beginning, once it was clear that the strategic study called for by the President would be undertaken outside regular National Security Council channels, the initiative and direction of the study group was supplied by the State Department members of the team, specifically by Paul Nitze and his colleagues in the 3-year old Policy Planning Staff. Nitze, succeeding George Kennan as the staff's director in January 1950, had the full confidence and support of Secretary Acheson throughout the 6-week drafting and comment period. The principal Defense Department representatives, Maj. Gen. James H. Burns (Ret.) and Maj. Gen. Truman H. Landon, could claim no such support and comfort from Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson.

The Policy Planning Staff of the State Department proved to be one of the more happy innovations in a department infrequently accused of boldness and imagination. Secretary Acheson accurately described the role of the staff in Senate executive session testimony in 1949:[18]

> This Policy Planning Staff was supposed to do and is doing two things: one, it is looking at the problems which are going to be here next month, and the month after, and the month after that, and not the problem which is happening today; then it is a constant source of criticism of what the Department is doing. It looks at what is going on, and says, "Does this activity still make sense? It was a perfectly good policy when you started it, but is it getting anywhere?" Or, "Are you just simply cranking along at the same old thing and making no progress?"
>
> They continually criticize what is being done; they continually warn you that there is something coming over the horizon now that is going to be a first-class problem and you have got to get to work; you have got to plan, to think, to get ready to meet it. They do not operate. They call in people from the operating divisions to consult with them. They then work out a policy plan, either one which tells you of something that is going to happen to you or one which reappraises what you are doing.

Nitze and his colleagues were eager to challenge prevailing Bureau of the Budget and Defense Department estimates that defense spending could not exceed $13.5 billion without seriously damaging the economy. In the summer of 1949 the Policy Planning Staff undertook a study of Soviet and American defense spending, an exercise that the past director of the Policy Planning Staff, George Kennan, would not likely have undertaken, convinced as he was into 1950 that existing resources were sufficient, if correctly used, to ensure American security from what he felt would be likely Soviet challenges.[19] That same summer Nitze and Kennan had conferred with Gen. Richard C. Lindsay, Deputy Director for Strategic Plans of the Joint Staff, in the first of a number of subsequent efforts to improve communication and facilitate joint State and Defense

strategic analysis and planning.[20] These efforts were to prove mutually frustrating owing to the recalcitrance of the Secretary of Defense, and to the reluctance of the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to delegate to their subordinates duties whose performance might be construed by their superiors as encroaching even slightly on the latter's policymaking authority. Three months after NSC-68 had been completed Nitze complained, in a memo to Acheson, that

> In the preparation of NSC papers on politico-military matters there is no way to obtain the views or comments of the service departments or the J[oint] C[hiefs] [of] S[taff] at the drafting stage. As a consequence, conflicting views are constantly brought to the NSC. This results in irritating and time consuming discussions which detract from the matters that ought to receive the full attention of the NSC.[21]

The fact that NSC-68 and subsequent studies focused closely on the issues of military preparedness and planning, as well as on more general issues of strategy and diplomacy, made these communication barriers between the State and Defense Departments all the more frustrating. Nitze himself was substantially better versed in issues of military capabilities and operations than was Kennan, his predecessor as Director of the Policy Planning Staff, and this difference in their experiences produced sharp differences in estimates of Soviet intentions and capabilities in the course of drafting NSC-68 and afterward. At one point following the start of the Korean war, for example, Nitze, concerned about reports that the Soviet Union was producing some 600 Mig-15 fighters per month, asked the Air Force to fly by the Sakhalin Island bases where it was believed a portion were stationed. As a result of this CIA estimates were partially verified.[22] This is information that Kennan would not likely have as actively pursued. As Director of the study group, Nitze was also the only member provided up to date stockpile figures for the American nuclear weapons inventory, figures still not released by the Department of Defense.[23] Sufficient information now exists, however, to enable one to formulate reasonably good estimates of the size of the American stockpile. Nitze and his colleagues spent considerable time assessing the contribution of nuclear weapons to U.S. defense, and the sections of NSC-68 discussing these issues are among the most carefully and judiciously drafted.[24]

Department of Defense. Nitze and his colleagues worked most closely with Maj. Gen. Truman H. Landon, Air Force member of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee (JSSC). The JSSC, on which each of the services had representation, was the principal policy planning arm of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. While the Joint Chiefs greatly valued the work of the JSSC, its findings and recommendations were purely advisory and could in no way be taken as the authoritative expression of the views of the Joint Chiefs, much less those of the Secretary of Defense.

General Landon's immediate superior was Maj. Gen. James H. Burns, U.S. Army (Ret.), the Special Consultant on Politico-Military Matters to Secretary of Defense Johnson. In the fall of 1949 Johnson had created a number of advisory posts and liaison offices within the National Military Establishment. In a vaguely worded directive Johnson indicated that General Burns would "serve as a policy advisor on important issues in [politico-military matters] . . . and, on such occasions and in such capacity, [would] discuss the policies relating to such issues, if required, with the ranking officials of the National Security Council, the Department of State and other government

agencies which may be concerned."[25] Johnson gave virtually the same instructions to Najeeb E. Halaby, who in the same memo had been designated Director of a new Office of Foreign Military Affairs[26] and was nominally Burns' subordinate. In any case Halaby, with Robert Le Baron, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Military Liaison Committee to the Atomic Energy Commission, joined Burns and Landon in the deliberations of the State-Defense study group, with Landon bearing the brunt of the work. This proved to be of crucial importance, for had Burns actively participated, he would have been required by Johnson to reflect the Secretary's rigid commitment to economy and incremental adjustments of the defense budget, a posture that was not required of the State Department representatives by Secretary Acheson. It may be too much to say that Landon's active participation, and Burns' sporadic involvement, "was perhaps the most important decision made in connection with NSC-68,"[27] but it was clear that Landon's relatively free hand during the drafting stage, together with the support of his colleagues in the JSSC, greatly aided the work of the joint study group. Once it became apparent that Nitze and his State Department colleagues contemplated a significant augmentation of current and short-term projected defense expenditures, those Defense Department officials privy to the study group's deliberations and supportive of the recommendations in various drafts of NSC-68, likely found it prudent to conceal their support from Louis Johnson and from his supporters among their colleagues.

National Security Council. While NSC-68 was a formal National Security Council document, and thus entered in its Permanent File Registry, the NSC itself, and its staff, had little to do with its preparation. However the NSC had, early in January 1950, begun to prepare for a major assessment of American strategic policy in light of the events of the previous year, and as a followup to NSC 20/4, "A Report on U.S. Objectives With Respect to the U.S.S.R. to Counter Soviet Threats to U.S. Security."[28] The President's letter of 31 January 1950 effectively transferred this task of a general reanalysis and updating of NSC 20/4 to the State-Defense study team quickly organized by Secretaries Acheson and Johnson.[29]

The effectiveness of the NSC staff was subject to considerable question. At a May 1949 meeting with Adm. Sidney Souers, Executive Secretary of the NSC, and his assistant and successor in that post, James S. Lay, Jr., a number of State Department officials urged that the NSC staff, whose role and purpose had never been clearly spelled out, not be required to draft policy papers for consideration of the council, a task thought best left to State's Policy Planning Staff. The NSC staff coordinator was in any case a member of the State Department detailed for that duty. George Kennan, then still the Policy Planning Staff Director, informed Souers and Lay that the PPS was planning to produce for NSC consideration an annual review of U.S. foreign policy. As reported by Under Secretary of State James E. Webb, the review would "cover where we have been and where we are going. The paper, which would be an estimate, would attempt to forecast the areas and projects to which we should give primary attention .... It will attempt to present a framework within which all government agencies could make plans for the following twelve months."[30] Similar, though more limited, summary estimates of the world situation had been and were continuing to be produced by the Central Intelligence Agency, with the cooperation and participation of State's intelligence division.[31]

State Department members were particularly concerned with actions of the

NSC staff in drafting designated "measures papers" designed to implement current NSC policy papers, including one drafted to implement Kennan's NSC 20/4, over State opposition. The Joint Chiefs particularly pressed for these measures papers, in search of some guidance in drafting their contingency war plans.[32] The "measures" paper for NSC 20/4 was not unlike NSC-68 in style and content. Its language was urgent, exhorting responsible members of the national security community to "secure," "maintain," "conduct," "initiate," "develop," "strengthen," "improve," "exploit," "encourage," "ready," "safeguard" a variety of measures designed to mobilize the military, political, economic, and psychological resources of the United States in an expected confrontation and series of confrontations with the U.S.S.R. and her allies, but with care taken to "avoid unduly impairing our economy and the fundamental values and institutions inherent in our way of life," a theme echoed a year later in NSC-68.[33] The measures and objectives were described in very general terms, with nowhere near the detail of NSC-68, and the presentation in general was much inferior to that of the latter. Kennan, on reading the measures paper, objected to it on some of the same grounds on which he would a year later oppose the drafting of NSC-68:[34]

> During the early stages of this project, the State Department representative on the NSC Staff [George H. Butler, Deputy Director of the Policy Planning Staff] consistently advanced the view that no useful purpose would be served by attempting to draft a detailed paper of this kind . . . . Mr. Butler took the position that such a report would lead to rigidity of U.S. position rather than to the flexibility of operations which is essential under present world conditions . . . on seeing the final document, I think it is dangerous to give State Department approval to it, and feel that we must make an issue of it in the NSC—rather on a point of principle concerning the basic approach to foreign policy problems rather than on the merits of the provisions of this particular document.

Similar objections to the measures paper were voiced by a number of others at an Under Secretary's meeting the day following Kennan's memo. At that meeting, attended by 18 senior State Department officials, including Paul Nitze, then Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, the group discussed the merits of Kennan's position, recommending finally that Kennan ask NSC Executive Secretary Admiral Souers to remove the draft report from the NSC agenda.[35] With the deterioration of the U.S. position following the summer of 1949, many State Department officials, again with the notable exceptions of Kennan and Charles Bohlen, grew less chary of formulating measures papers that questioned the wisdom of officially sanctioned budgetary constraints, despite their possible interpretation as according Presidential assent to this or that specific action.

Nuclear Weapons and National Defense. Detection of a Soviet nuclear explosion, together with other events, spurred the commissioning of NSC-68 and it is not surprising that the members of the study group devoted substantial attention to the significance of nuclear and thermonuclear weapons for the preservation of U.S. national security. Of the six official consultants to the study group, five—J. Robert Oppenheimer, James B. Conant, Chester I. Barnard, Henry D. Smyth, and Ernest O. Lawrence—had participated directly or indirectly in the shaping of U.S. atomic energy policy during and after

the war.[36] It is impossible today to convey the anguish, the puzzlement, and the determination that characterized debates on the significance of atomic weapons in the years 1945-50. Mired in deep pessimism, decision-makers constructed entire families of counterfactual situations in which the United States and the Soviet Union were alternately favored or handicapped in an imagined state of war. At the end of 1949 the 4½-year American nuclear monopoly had ended. Yet in all this time no officially articulated strategic doctrine existed, the availability of a number of contingency war plans not to the contrary. Prior to NSC 20/4, war plans were devised by the Joint Strategic Plans Committee in the Department of Defense with minimal guidance from members of the Joint Chiefs, the National Security Council, or the Department of State. A substantial measure of risk aversion, a product of the uncertainty the drafters of these documents experienced, required that worst-case assumptions of Soviet capabilities and intentions drive these analyses. Estimates of the availability of 175-200 Soviet divisions for the conquest of Western Europe were routine in the war plans of the BUSHWACKER-BROILER-HALFMOON-FLEETWOOD-DOUBLESTAR series (1948-49), and it was assumed that Allied forces could not begin ground operations to recapture territory in Western Europe and the Middle East until at least D + 10 months following the initial Soviet attacks.[37]

While many had significant reservations about the value of such detailed planning for the eventual deployment of forces in actual combat,[38] the most significant reservations about the content of the plans, rather than about the exercise itself, were political in nature, though they were couched in the form of technical demurrers to the possibility of this or that mission, weapon, or tactic. Specifically, the entire series of war plans beginning in 1948 envisioned principal reliance for offensive retaliatory action on the Air Force's Strategic Air Command, leaving naval carrier task forces and Army ground combat units the task of securing and holding territory freed of enemy occupation by aerial bombing, conventional, but primarily nuclear, at least in the first phases of combat. The conflict between the Air Force and the Navy particularly embittered senior military and civilian policymakers and produced a caricature of reasoned examination of strategic roles and missions in the 2 years preceding the drafting of NSC-68. The debate over the conclusions of the Harmon Report (11 May 1949) presaged the bitter clash between the Air Force and Navy later that year in the so-called "Revolt of the Admirals."[39] While both Air Force and Navy officials periodically denied that the use of nuclear weapons would be "decisive" in a clash with the Soviet Union, both services sought vigorously to demonstrate each other's infirmities for such a mission, with an eye to securing "fair shares" of what both expected to be miserly defense budgets for the years 1948-51.

Defining a role for the use of nuclear weapons within a clearly articulated strategic doctrine describing an effective force structure proved one of the most difficult tasks in the drafting of NSC-68. Secretary Acheson, in a memo dictated in December 1949, well described the dilemmas confronting American strategic planners regarding the role of nuclear weapons.[40] It merits extensive quotation:

> (1) [Why are we] in effect deciding to rely upon and use such weapons . . . .
>
> (a) Because while we had atomic weapons and no other nation had, it came to be regarded as a powerful deterrent to war and guarantee of our security; the Atomic Energy Act authorizes production of weapons upon this

theory; they came to play a large part in military planning; and Russian behavior over the past few years overcame popular aversion to the use of the weapon. Thus acceptance of and reliance upon it has grown more subtly than through any articulate major premise.

(b) Because, having assumed commitments relating to the defense of Western Europe, as necessary for our own defense, we do not have any other military program which seems to offer over the short run promise of military effectiveness. Therefore we are proceeding with the development of atomic weapons and carriers. (Note: This reasoning does not prove that atomic weapons provide the promise of military success . . . .)

(c) And because also our proposals for international control will not be accepted by the Russians, a situation which produces deadlock and means the inevitable continuation of production and mutual plans for use.

(2) It is also necessary to review and decide our position regarding the essentiality of atomic weapons because without it our position on international control . . . becomes confused and dangerous.

(a) We cannot over a period of time carry conviction (and this is of vital importance in the cold war) in advocating and directing the effort for international control and abolition of atomic weapons, if at the same time our military reliance upon them is growing.

(b) We cannot consider profitably any proposals which might be acceptable to the Russians and might prohibit for practical purposes in peace time all production of fissionable materials in sufficient quantity to make bombs, unless we know whether we want to do so, or not.

(c) If we proceed with further development of atomic weapons, without a clear idea of our attitude toward their use, control, or abolition, we will affect the attitude of the Russians—and the chances of avoiding war—, the attitude of our allies—, and the course of the cold war—, and the attitude of our own public. In other words, we will affect in various ways the direction of drift.

(3) The absence of a clear decision will confuse military planning and this in turn will confuse foreign policy and commitments . . . .

VI (1) Would a continued accumulation of atomic weapons and means of delivery actually stimulate the outbreak of war? It does not appear that this would be likely until such time as the U.S.S.R. considered that its atomic capabilities were sufficient to offset ours and had a clear superiority in other fields . . . .

Concern for the lack of a clearly articulated strategic doctrine defining the role of nuclear weapons proceeded simultaneously with urgent demands from a number of participants for the speedy demonstration of the feasibility of a thermonuclear bomb. Following the report of the Soviet atomic explosion, the recommendations of the General Advisory Committee of the Atomic Energy Commission against proceeding with the development of such weapons carried weight with senior officials,[41] and AEC commissioners David Lilienthal, Sumner Pike, and Henry Smyth continued to press against development. Many, however, agreed with Senator Brian McMahon, Chairman of the Joint Committee on Atomic

Energy, who in a letter to President Truman observed that "there is no moral dividing line that I can see between a big explosion which causes heavy damage and many smaller explosions causing equal or still greater damage."[42]

Determination of an optimal force structure, assignment of missions and roles to the services, and judging the adequacy of prevailing strategic doctrine requires some fairly precise knowledge of the size and composition of the American nuclear stockpile for the years 1945-50. We noted earlier that Nitze alone among the State Department members of the study group was provided official access to this data. While numerical projections of the size of the Soviet nuclear stockpile are contained in NSC-68, no comparable information is provided or discussed for the U.S. stockpile. Indeed, this data is still classified, under provisions of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954 (42 U.S.C. 2161) and Section 8 of Executive Order 11652 (318/72).[43]

Some notion of the size of the U.S. stockpile would do much to explain the attitudes of a variety of officials engaged in the policy planning process in those first months of 1950. As Quester emphasizes,[44]

> . . . so much of the strategic speculation of this period may have been crucially dependent on whether the United States possessed 25 or 250 or 2,500 bombs of Hiroshima size. How "impossible" would a preemption of Soviet nuclear development have been in 1948, or a "taking out" of the development in 1950? . . . one can see how the retrospective interpretation of the atomic bomb as an ultimate weapon is related to complementary self-evaluations very widely held amongst Americans . . . . The explanation [commonly] offered for the failure to impose territorial demands on the Russians (e.g., demands for the democratization of Poland and the Balkans, for a corridor to Berlin, or even for substantial political changes in the U.S.S.R. itself) is that the West "trusted" the Soviets in a mood of magnanimity or naivete unprecedented in international politics; the West's trust was thus presumably betrayed. As the weight of the atomic bomb is downgraded, however, then all this period does not seem so stupid or paradoxical. An honest explanation of these events probably will have to be more complicated, less flattering to the generosity of the West, more flattering to the strategic sensibility of the American leaders involved.

Indeed, the drafters of NSC-68 were very sensitive to just such considerations. Charles E. Bohlen, then Minister in Paris, wrote to Nitze in April 1950, after aiding the study group the previous month, that "too much emphasis has been given to the atomic bomb as a deterrent in the past while we had the monopoly." He continued,

> I think it is difficult to deduce any evidence that this monopoly on our part influenced Soviet policy during this period or abated its aggressiveness. Conversely and logically, there has perhaps been too much emphasis placed upon the effect on Soviet policy of their possession of the atomic weapon.[45]

The study group finally agreed that "although the United States probably now possesses, principally in atomic weapons, *a force adequate to deliver a powerful blow upon the Soviet Union and to open the road to victory in a long war,* it is not sufficient by itself to advance the position of the United States in the cold war."[46]

In any case, it is clear that the number of atomic bombs--assembled

and unassembled—could not have been very large. Brodie estimates that by the beginning of the Korean war "the United States had accumulated only about three hundred fission bombs, each having a yield roughly twice that of the 20 kiloton bomb used at Nagasaki," all designated for use in Europe and the Soviet Union.[47] It is known that considerable production and supply difficulties greatly reduced the supply of bombs anticipated shortly after the war. Quester notes that "[g]reat amazement and concern were now several times expressed within the government on the small size of the stockpile, and this perhaps explains why only two bombs were detonated in tests in 1946 (at Bikini) and none in 1947."[48]

Recently declassified papers of the Joint Chiefs of Staff provide a fairly precise estimate of the number of nuclear weapons the military thought necessary for combat, and of the number that were likely to be available at specific times. Thus, in a 29 October 1947 memorandum for the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission (Lilienthal), Fleet Adm. William D. Leahy, for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, declared that "If a decision is made by competent authority to use atomic bombs, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have determined that for war a military requirement exists for approximately 400 atomic bombs of destructive power equivalent to the Nagasaki type bomb."[49]

Eight months later, the number of bombs estimated to be required for the first stage of a conflict with the Soviet Union was halved. Thus, in a memo of 7 July 1948 Maj. Gen. D.M. Schlatter, USAF, the Acting Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations, for Atomic Energy noted, in part:[50]

> 1. General Kenney's letter states the proposition that if he had the capability to launch two hundred (200) atomic bombs simultaneously, he could insure the United States against any enemy attack other than sporadic raids. He points out that the 70 Group [of combat aircraft] program will give him sufficient airplanes and crews to execute such a mission but that availability of atomic bombs is a limiting factor.
>
> 2. General Kenney therefore recommends that a program be set up as the ultimate USAF goal as follows:
>
> (a) production of a bomb which can be assembled and stockpiled so as to be made available at loading areas within 24 to 48 hours;
>
> (b) a stockpile of two hundred (200) bombs to be fabricated and stored in selected base areas;
>
> (c) sufficient assembly personnel to be trained to provide for simultaneous dispatch of two hundred (200) bombs; and
>
> (d) the USAF to assume control of the stockpile.

General Schlatter notes further that "by 1 January 1951, AFSWP [Armed Forces Special Weapons Project] will have the capability to assemble one hundred (100) bombs simultaneously but that the simultaneous assembly of two hundred (200) bombs appears beyond the planned capability . . . ."[51]

The more advanced Mark IV bomb was still under development in late 1948. Safety considerations precluded bombs being stored for long periods in fully assembled form, thus requiring rapid assembly and loading by carefully trained assembly teams, and careful construction of assembly and storage facilities.[52] These considerations severely restricted the number of bombs available on instant notice. A memo by Air Force Chief of Staff Vandenberg outlined projected capabilities of assembly teams in late 1948:[53]

> 3. The study on which the requirement for stockpile expressed in J.C.S. 1745/5 was

based envisioned attacks on approximately 100 different urban locations. Multiple attacks on some of the locations raised the total required on target to approximately 150. The efficient utilization of atomic bombs will dictate the use of one bomb only in any one attack on an objective area. Therefore, the maximum which would be dispatched in any one attack under present conditions is unlikely to exceed 100.

4. It is recognized that the requirement for a daily assembly rate of 100 bombs cannot be met in the near future with present type teams and the Nagasaki type bomb . . . [6.] It is therefore recommended that the Joint Chiefs of Staff: a. Establish an objective . . . that assembly organizations and facilities be capable of final assembly of atomic bombs on operating bases at the rate of 25 per day . . . .

By 1 January 1950 just 225 aircraft capable of delivering atomic bombs [one bomb per sortie], plus 78 B-29 tankers, were ready for service in the Strategic Air Command, and training programs for Bomb Assembly, Bomb Commanders, and Weaponeers, though "well advanced," were not expected to be completed until June of that year.[54] Estimated attrition rates of 10-25 percent were thought not unlikely given the known and projected Soviet investment in air defense capability.

At the time the NSC-68 study team began its work, then, the potency of the U.S. military capabilities, while not insignificant, was clearly more modest than many had thought, a fact that Nitze certainly, and perhaps a few others on the study team, knew to be the case. On the basis of the data discussed here and of other recently released documentation, it is likely that Brodie's estimate of the number of nuclear weapons available at the onset of the Korean war was optimistic by a third. The number that could have successfully been delivered on target was certainly smaller still.

The foregoing account indicates that great uncertainty accompanied construction of estimates of American strategic strength in the few weeks in which the NSC-68 study team worked. The Soviet atomic explosion in late 1949 took most by surprise, though in hindsight some came to think that it should not have been so unexpected.[55] All the while the U.S. Air Force was fighting mightily for full custody of and operational responsibility for the nation's yet meager stockpile of nuclear weapons, successfully engaging the Navy in a bizarre encounter in which one senior naval officer labeled strategic bombing "as practiced in the past and as proposed for the future . . . militarily unsound and of limited effort, . . . morally wrong, and . . . decidedly barmful to the stability of a postwar world."[56] The Navy nevertheless wanted nuclear weapons, and had indeed been assured some participation in their custody and use at the Key West conference of March 1948.

It should be emphasized that the military, here considered as represented by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the network of staff committees beneath them, constantly sought policy guidance from the civilian planners of this period, and were repeatedly frustrated in this search by what they viewed as the inability or unwillingness of the State Department and National Security Council to provide them with clear policy directives that they would then implement. NSC 20/4 (23 November 1948), "U.S. Objectives With Respect to the U.S.S.R. to Counter Soviet Threats to U.S. Security," while helpful to the Chiefs and to the members of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee, was still sufficiently vague so as to make planning for its implementation little more than an exercise in the construction of wish lists by each of the services.

In any case, it was clear that direct military influence was rather unfocused and of modest influence on the members of the NSC-68 study team, not in the sense that military matters were not seriously considered—this in fact was a principal, if not the main, focus of NSC-68—but rather in the sense that the preponderance of suggestions that a nonincremental increase in U.S. defensive capabilities was imperative came not from the Department of Defense, whose military and civilian leadership felt bound by and actively defended a defense budget for fiscal 1950 of less than $15 billion,[57] but from the civilian planners of the State Department. The Joint Chiefs continually sought to receive—not offer—policy guidance for force planning from the National Security Council. Numerous NSC studies, many originating in State's Policy Planning Staff, sought to offer such guidance, in greater or lesser detail, throughout the decade following the major reorganization and reconstruction of the national security establishment in 1947.

The self-limiting nature of military participation in national security decisionmaking characterized the entire postwar period. "With the exception of a few activists such as Arthur Radford, Maxwell Taylor, and Arleigh Burke, the Joint Chiefs of Staff since World War II have sought to maintain the formal division between policy decision in the subordinate area of administration and implementation over which they claim authority."[58] George Marshall's considerable influence with Harry Truman occurred during the former's civilian tenure as Secretary of State and of Defense. The Chiefs had no direct operational role in any of the services, though they were and are invariably held accountable for all manner of strategic and tactical reverses.[59] This eventual assent to the contents of NSC-68, together with that of their obstinate Secretary, Louis Johnson, produced for the President the political support he desired before he was to decide whether, and how, the recommendations of the document were to be implemented.

Perceptions of U.S. Economic Capabilities. By the close of 1949 the Defense Department had long been resigned to a modest fiscal 1950 budget of $13.5 billion. The Policy Planning Staff members of the joint study group quickly extended "an invitation [to their Defense Department counterparts] to break out of the straitjacket of Defense Department strategic thinking and to explore unencumbered by the severe budgetary pressures of the Truman-Johnson administration, the strategic requirements of national security."[60] Bureau of the Budget Director Frank Pace, Louis Johnson, and numerous members of Congress were convinced that the nation's economy could not withstand massive deficits necessary in order to finance a larger defense establishment. Adverting to the unwillingness of Britain to assume anew a leading role in world politics, John Lukacs has observed:[61]

> There is a standard . . . explanation of [Britain's] condition. Their finances were exhausted, they were on the verge of bankruptcy: a hard economic fact. They had spent most of their money in the Second World War; consequently they could no longer afford to play the role of a great power. Allow me to challenge this hard economic fact. When people say they cannot afford something, this usually means that they don't want to afford it . . . . Germany in the 1930's could not afford to spend money on armaments: Hitler gave this economic condition not a thought. In the summer of 1940 the British could nary afford to fight Hitler, low as they were in

> cash, and devoid of guns, rifles, tanks: they gave this economic condition not a thought· rightly so. In the lives of individuals as well as in the lives of nations . . . the Hard Facts of Economics turn out, especially in retrospect, to have been the softest factor of all.

The United States would soon learn this to be the case, with the Korean war just 2 months away from the completion of NSC-68. The study group, convinced that the country could successfully shoulder the burden of a $35-50 billion defense budget, should events prove that necessary, received various estimates of American economic potential, many of which concurred with its conclusions. The Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, reviewing a draft of NSC-68, noted that:

> If one compares the total economic capacity, the gap [between the U.S. and U.S.S.R.] is so tremendous that a slight and slow narrowing would have little meaning. Our economy has doubled its capacity about every twenty years for at least four such periods, and it has not stopped growing. Population increase, technology and compound interest take care of that. And the U.S.S.R. will have great difficulty in making comparable gains in absolute terms from so much lower a base.[62]

The Council of Economic Advisors concurred, noting that "the United States economy's capacity for growth is such that substantial new programs could be undertaken without serious threat to our standards of living, and without risking a transformation of the free character of our economy."[63] A number who read NSC-68 voiced concern that the expenditures contemplated, though not spelled out there, might prove to destabilize the economy in a dangerous fashion. Thus, a Bureau of the Budget staff member warned:

> The implications of higher military expenditures are of course mainly a matter of degree. It cannot be said that at any point such expenditures are "too high." They must be sufficient to meet minimum requirements for the security of the Nation. But security rests in economics as well as military strength, and our consideration should be given to the tendency for military expenditures to reduce the potential rate of economic growth, and at an advance stage to require measures which may seriously impair the functioning of our system.[64]

Others saw the consequences of greatly increased military expenditures to be still more far-reaching. Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Edward W. Barrett, commenting on a late draft of NSC-68, noted:

> My most important point: the whole paper seems to me to point to a gigantic armament race, a huge buildup of conventional arms that quickly become obsolescent, a greatly expanded military establishment in being. I think that, however much as we whip up sentiment, we are going to run into vast opposition among informed people to a huge arms race. We will be warned that we are heading toward a "garrison state." Moreover, even if we should sell the idea, I fear that the U.S. public would rapidly tire of such an effort. In the absence of real and continuing crises, a dictatorship can unquestionably outlast a democracy in a conventional armament race.[65]

Unconvinced, some, like study group consultant Dr. Ernest O. Lawrence, believed the costs of investment in strategic weapons to be "chicken feed,"[66] and urged greater investment in basic science and scientific education.

All who reviewed that document agreed that its "message" should be publicized vigorously to prepare the public for the sacrifices to be asked of them. Robert Lovett, a study group consultant, suggested that "the Conclusions [of NSC-68] should be stated simply, clearly, and in almost telegraphic style," or in what he referred to as "Hemingway sentences" adding that "if we can sell every useless article known to man in large quantities, we should be able to sell our very fine story in larger quantities."[67] George Kennan, echoing similar views, stressed that it was not only the public that required instruction in the substance of U.S. Foreign policy:[68]

> I think it quite essential that we find a new and much more effective approach to the problem of making our policies understood within this Government and among our own people . . . . You still have the most distinguished and influential of our columnists and diplomatic observers making statements which reflect an almost incredible ignorance of basic elements of our foreign policy, to say nothing of the state of mind of Congressional circles. The first prerequisite for people who are to concern themselves with explaining policy to others is that they themselves should understand it . . . . I think that we must not fear the principle of indoctrination within the government service . . . . There is no reason why every responsible officer of the Department and Foreign Service should not be schooled and drilled in the handling of the sort of questions concerning our foreign policy which are raised morning after morning by Lippmann and Krock and others . . . .

Such views were not uncommon among those close to the study group, and a general concern for ensuring the psychological readiness of the American public for substantially increased defense expenditures grew among the study group members as they neared completion of their project. Concern and attention were expressed as well in NSC-68 itself for the psychological readiness of the Soviet public for the opportunity to rebel against their regime, particularly during a state of war with the United States. Efforts to produce such a receptivity for rebellion were undertaken by way of planning for massive psychological warfare in the event the United States was forced into war and resulted in the drafting of, among other contingency plans, NSC-74, "A Plan for National Psychological Warfare," 10 July 1950.[69]

Conclusions. NSC-68 is above all a close examination of U.S. military capabilities and intentions drafted in a period when the nation's position in international affairs appeared particularly bleak, and when the necessity for a nonincremental increase in its investment for defense and security thus seemed especially compelling. At a meeting early in 1950 of the Policy Planning Staff, Director Paul Nitze outlined the basis of the general apprehension:[70]

> There are an increasing number of signs of toughness on the part of the Kremlin: the informal opinion of the Joint Chiefs now is that the Soviet Union could begin a major attack from a standing start so that the usual signs of mobilization and preparation would be lacking; there are increasing indications that some of the basic elements of Communist dogma no longer hold, i.e., that the Communist bastion has infinite time in which to achieve its purpose, that capitalist nations carry within themselves the seeds of their own destruction which require watering but not planting

> by the Soviet Union, that the Red Army is used only when a revolutionary atmosphere makes the situation right for the coup de grace, etc.

While Kennan, Bohlen, and others disagreed strongly with this assessment of Soviet capabilities and intentions, they did not oppose an increase in defense spending so long as the funds appropriated decreased the considerable U.S. reliance on its nuclear weapons inventory, a consideration with which study group members generally concurred, though the latter simultaneously pressed for the development and deployment of the hydrogen bomb. The near exclusive reliance on the nuclear deterrent and fighting force, embodied in all the Pentagon's contingency war plans of the period, was something that all involved in the NSC-68 planning process viewed with great concern, an attitude shared with numerous contemporary public commentators. Quincy Wright, in the July 1950 issue of *World Politics*, warned that "'containment' may tend to produce a mentality of security behind the atom bomb, while revolution, difficulties over succession, or gradual administrative or scientific deterioration within the Soviet Union is hopefully and wishfully awaited."[71] The discomfort felt by study group members with the heavy U.S. reliance on its strategic arsenal failed, paradoxically, to dampen their enthusiasm for possession of the hydrogen bomb: "If the U.S. develops a thermonuclear weapon ahead of the U.S.S.R., the U.S. should for the time being be able to bring increased pressure on the U.S.S.R." (NSC-68, Ch. VIII, A7).

Why this should be the case when exclusive possession of the atomic bomb for 4 years brought no readily discernible (to the Americans, at least) restraint in Soviet foreign policy is never explained in the document. Several pages later in NSC-68 it is admitted that "one of the present realities is that the United States is not prepared to threaten the use of our present atomic superiority to coerce the Soviet Union into acceptable agreements" (Ch. IX, A4). Again, it is not clear how or why the United States would have been any more "prepared" to take advantage of a thermonuclear capability when it could not or would not with its atomic capability in the face of what it had determined, in a series of foreign policy crises after 1945, to be significant Soviet provocation.[72] The limited size of the U.S. stockpile, as we have seen, would account for some of this American "restraint," but would not alone make clear the full misgivings of U.S. defense planners. The documentary record does consistently demonstrate the presence of great uncertainty, and considerable risk aversion, surrounding discussions of these fundamental issues in 1949 and 1950.

NSC-68, together with the Truman Doctrine 3 years earlier, were most certainly instances in which the threats to U.S. national security were calculatedly "oversold." In both cases, but especially in the former, the reasons for such "marketing" of the product were clear. Paul R. Schulman's comments on the origins of America's space program bear directly on the intentions impelling the drafters of NSC-68:[73]

> It often happens that nonincremental policy managers, painfully aware of the vulnerabilities to which their programs are subject, will go to great lengths to establish congenial political environments. Frequently, a nonincremental policy will be "oversold" to the public in order to gain the support and resources deemed essential in the overcoming of thresholds. Once oversold, it becomes difficult to modify the basic objectives of the policy without threatening the political foundations upon which its support has been based.

Nitze and his colleagues contemplated a tripling of the current defense budget, were all or most of the NCS-68 recommendations to be implemented—an effort that made economy-minded administration officials blanch in horror. Many of these officials, however, were equally disturbed with the grim portrayal of American security outlined in NSC-68 and, because they were not immediately required to obligate departmental resources for the programs of rearmament envisaged in the document, felt free to assent to its conclusions, in the knowledge that, at least in the short term, they would not be required to defend them before the Congress and the public until the political waters had been tested by the President and his chief advisors in the National Security Council. Nitze and Acheson knew that Truman supported their efforts, and would blunt Secretary Johnson's wrath at the project and its leadership. Following the submission of the document to the President, efforts were quickly organized to "cost out" the major program recommendations. Less than 2 months after the first meeting (2 May 1950) of the Ad Hoc Committee on NSC-68, the Korean war began, and rearmament commenced in earnest, following closely the directions outlined in NSC-68.

To what extent was the decision-making process leading to NSC-68 a "rational" one, perhaps worthy of preservation and reinforcement? Three observations may be made here. First, the State Department's new Policy Planning Staff, directed successively by Kennan and Nitze, proved adept at providing Secretaries Marshall and Acheson with a measure of foreign policy forecasting capability and analysis unknown to their predecessors. The doctrine of containment, formulated by Kennan and others at least as early as 1946, had by 1950 achieved axiomatic status, receiving virtually unanimous support by senior civilian and military officials, and by the general public. It remains the "core consensual goal"[74] of American foreign policy to this day, surviving a series of alterations in emphasis, from the "rollback" rhetoric of the Eisenhower-Dulles years, to the détente strategy pursued by three Democratic (Kennedy, Johnson, Carter) and two Republican (Nixon, Ford) administrations. Korea and Vietnam represent failures of implementation of a policy—containment—whose main lines had been laid down almost immediately after the defeat of the Axis powers in 1945. The onset of the Korean war, of course, confirmed the worst suspicions of the drafters of NSC-68, and while critics like Kennan and Bohlen still demurred from the document's account of Soviet intention, the events of late June 1950 confirmed for the participants of the study group the accuracy and timeliness of their analysis.

Next, it must be emphasized that the study group solicited a divergent range of views and opinion in the course of drafting the document, and during the subsequent period of revision and amendment, despite the fact that the drafting process was conducted in considerable secrecy. The document, it must be recalled, expressed great pessimism about the readiness of the United States in the event of a major confrontation with the Soviet Union, even were its recommendations to be adopted in their entirety. These misgivings were shared by advocates and critics of NSC-68 alike, all parties working in an unfamiliar environment not unlike that which presented itself to the U.S. political and military elite a decade and a half later in the course of Vietnam war deliberations.[75] The costs of rearmament and the likelihood of public support for the same were actively debated in 1950, as they were in 1968. In both cases, active deliberations and settled views were, in some real sense, chronically "overtaken by events." That this was so cannot count against the

rationality of the process generating response after response to new configurations of issues and data, unless it could be demonstrated that a Gresham's Law of planning drove the system to failure—unless, that is, it could be shown that "bad" plans, opinions, and advice, systematically drove out "good" versions of these. It is at least as likely, as Robert Levine has argued, that good and bad plans coexisted, and could not readily be distinguished by decision-makers, individually rational though they might be.[76] These considerations thus alert us to be sensitive to the fallacy of composition described early in the paper, viz., to avoid conflicting the rationality of the decisionmakers with the rationality of the process, of which they are a part.

Finally, we must emphasize again the great turbulence of events surrounding the drafting of NSC-68, and the enormous uncertainty and apprehension confronted in a series of deliberations culminating in the drafting of that document and its subsequent revision. Many of the participants in the project were convinced that time was against them and their European allies, despite the acknowledged enormous devastation suffered by the U.S.S.R. in the recent war. The onset of the Korean war confirmed in the minds of most, if not all, of the participants in the drafting of NSC-68 the essential accuracy of their analysis and forecasts, and thus set a precedent for the later commissioning of a series of similar ad hoc analyses of U.S. foreign policy position papers of varying scope and influence. These had the unfortunate byproduct of transferring an enormous amount of discretion in the shaping of American foreign policy from the Congress to the President, a process that was to display its full consequences in the course of American participation in the Vietnam war.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Sam Postbrief received his Ph.D. degree in political science from Indiana University. He is Assistant Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland. He is on leave this year in order to serve as a consultant to the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division of the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress. His research focus is on legislative-executive relations and he is now engaged in a study of the role of the Congress in foreign policy formulation.

NOTES

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1. See the accounts in Samuel P. Huntington, *The Common Defense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961) and Burton M. Sapin, *The Making of United States Foreign Policy* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1966).

2. Though the struggles within the Department of Defense during the 1950s and 1960s involved rather greater sophistication on the part of the participants, the stakes were not dissimilar from those marking the birth of the modern defense establishment. See, e.g., Adam Yarmolinsky, *The Military Establishment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) and Alain C. Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, *How Much is Enough?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

3. Representative examples are given in: Morton H. Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1974); I. Destler, *Presidents, Bureaucrats, and Foreign Policy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974); John D. Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974); Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision* (New York: Little, Brown, 1971). Critical appraisals of this literature may be found in: Robert Art, "Bureaucratic Politics and American Foreign Policy," *Policy Sciences*, December 1973; Stephen D. Krasner, "Are Bureaucracies Important?" *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1972; Colin S. Gray, *The Soviet-American Arms Race* (Lexington, Mass.: Saxon House/Lexington Books, 1976); and James A. Nathan and James K. Oliver, "Bureaucratic

Politics: Academic Windfalls and Intellectual Pitfalls," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, Spring 1978.

4. See, respectively, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Origins of the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs*, October 1967, p. 49, and George F. Kennan, "The United States and the Soviet Union, 1917-76," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1976, p. 681. It is, of course, entirely possible that both Schlesinger and Kennan are correct. Stalin's paranoia, with its bizarre and horrible consequences for Soviet internal affairs may yet not have impaired his perception and judgment of external relations.

5. Amos Perlmutter, "The Presidential Political Center and Foreign Policy: A Critique of the Revisionist and Bureaucratic-Political Orientations," *World Politics*, October 1974, p. 94.

6. See the comments of McGeorge Bundy, 25 years ago, describing the President's capabilities: "I would suggest that Mr. Truman's policy of military economy before Korea was a policy which Mr. Truman could quite easily have changed by the use of his own office and powers. I think this episode shows inadequate leadership, not the power of pressure groups," in William Yandell Elliott, ed., *United States Foreign Policy: Its Organization and Control* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 264.

7. George H. Quester, *Nuclear Diplomacy* (New York: Dunellen, 1970), pp. xvii, xix.

8. See Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

9. Martin Landau, "Redundancy, Rationality, Duplication and Overlap," *Public Administration Review*, September 1969, and Robert Levine, *Public Planning* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

10. Paul Y. Hammond, "NSC-68: Prologue to Rearmament," in Warner R. Schilling, et al., *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 267-378.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 364.

12. Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: Norton, 1969), p. 374.

13. Gabriel A. Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), p. 12.

14. *Ibid.*

15. For a detailed account of the events surrounding the drafting of the Truman Doctrine, see Joseph M. Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks* (New York: Viking Press, 1955).

16. "Report by the Special Committee of the National Security Council to the President, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950* (Washington: U.S. Dept. of State, 1977), p. 517. Hereinafter the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series will be cited: FRUS/year/v./p.

17. "The President to the Secretary of State," 31 January 1950, FRUS/1950, FRUS/1950/v. 1/p. 141.

18. Secretary of State Dean G. Acheson, testimony, 2 February 1949, Executive Session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Historical Series), v. II (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1976), p. 103.

19. Hammond, pp. 287f. Nitze's colleagues on the Policy Planning Staff included: Ware Adames, Robert G. Hooker, R. Gorden Arneson, J. Lampton Berry, Harry H. Schwartz, George Butler, Carlton Savage, John Davies, Robert Tufts, Dorothy Fosdick, John Ferguson, Richard Scammon, Louis Halle, Charles Stelle, Henry Owen, and Robert Joyce.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

21. "Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Nitze) to the Secretary of State," 12 July 1950, FRUS/1950/v. 1/p. 341.

22. Interviews with Paul H. Nitze, 12 November 1977, 29 May 1979.

23. *Ibid.* U.S. stockpile data was probably among the two or three most closely held military secrets. President Truman, in the second volume of his memoirs, asserts: "For example, in no document in my office, in the AEC, or anywhere in government, could anyone find the exact figure of the number of bombs in stockpile, or the number of bombs to be produced, or the amount of material scheduled for production. If anyone should happen to run across a document dealing with atomic weapons production, he will find either a cipher or a blank in the space where the actual figure should appear. The figure in question would be recorded on separate and detached pieces of paper safeguarded in a special way and of which only a bare minimum of copies exist," Harry S. Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), p. 302. It turns out that Truman was wrong. A number of documents has turned up in the files of the National Archives that do contain information bearing on the size and condition of the American nuclear stockpile for the years 1946-50.

24. Nitze himself had visited Hiroshima as part of the Joint Strategic Bombing Survey, and thus was personally acquainted with the capabilities of the new generation of weapons. He later served as a consultant for the Gaither Committee (1957), as an Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Secretary of the Navy, and Deputy Secretary of Defense in the

Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and as the Defense Department's representative at the SALT talks (through 1974).

25. "Memorandum by the Secretary of Defense re Organization for the handling of Politico-Military Matters in the National Military Establishment," 3 August 1949, FRUS/1949/v. 1/pp. 365f.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Hammond, p. 303.

28. FRUS/1948/v. 1/pt. 2/p. 589. NSC 20/4 was drafted by George Kennan.

29. Hammond, pp. 293, 294.

30. "State Department Participation in the NSC," Memorandum of Conversation by Under Secretary of State Webb, FRUS/1949/v. 1/p. 298.

31. See, for example, "The Possibility of Direct Soviet Military Action During 1949," ORE 46-49, 3 May 1949, Central Intelligence Agency, Record Group 319, Records of the Army Staff, on file at the Modern Military Records Branch (hereinafter MMRB), National Archives, Washington, D.C. This estimate (declassified 9 February 1977) and a number of related ones produced in 1947-50 was drafted by a Joint Ad Hoc Committee composed of representatives of CIA, and the intelligence divisions of State, the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

32. See the account of defense planning in Kenneth W. Condit, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy: Vol. II, 1947-1949*, 22 April 1976, Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, MMRB, declassified 13 March 1978.

33. "Measures Required to Achieve U.S. Objectives with Respect to the U.S.S.R.," 30 March 1949, Draft Report by the National Security Council Staff, FRUS/1949/v. 1/pp. 271f.

34. Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Kennan) to the Secretary of State and the Under Secretary of State (Webb), 14 April 1949, FRUS/1949/v. 1/p. 282. See also Kennan's remarks as recorded by James Q. Reber, Director of the Executive Secretariat, State Department, at an Under Secretary's meeting, 15 April 1942, FRUS/1949/v. 1/p. 282.

35. Nitze interviews.

36. J. Robert Oppenheimer, Chairman of the General Advisory Committee of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, Director of Los Alamos Laboratories of Manhattan Engineer District, 1943-45; James B. Conant, President of Harvard University, Member of the General Advisory Committee of the AEC; Chester I. Barnard, President of the Rockefeller Foundation, Member of the Board of Consultants of the Secretary of State's Committee on Atomic Energy, 1946; Henry D. Smyth, Member of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, Ernest O. Lawrence, Director of the Radiation Laboratory, University of California, participant in the Manhattan Project. The sixth consultant, Robert A. Lovett, had been Assistant Secretary of War for Air, 1941-45, Under Secretary of State, 1947-49, and was appointed Deputy Secretary of Defense, September 1950.

37. A detailed account of the genesis of these plans may be found in Condit, chaps. 9, 10. For excerpts from these plans see Thomas Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis, eds., *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945-50* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), pp. 302-338. Full texts of the plans are available at the National Archives, Modern Military Records Branch, Washington, D.C.

38. James Forrestal was especially dubious of the value of detailed military planning, convinced that such plans would invariably be overtaken by events. See, e.g., Walter Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), pp. 513f. George Kennan and Charles Bohlen at the State Department similarly discounted the value of detailed political and military planning, fearing the possibility of irreversible short-term commitments to questionable doctrines.

39. The Harmon Report, commissioned by the Joint Chiefs to evaluate the first phase of war plan TROJAN, concluded that while damage to the Soviet Union would be extensive in the planned atomic attack on 70 target cities and industrial facilities, it alone would in no way prove decisive. For a discussion of the Harmon Report see Condit, pp. 313f. Excerpts from the report may be found in Etzold and Gaddis, pp. 360f.

40. "Memorandum by the Secretary of State," 20 December 1949, FRUS/1949/v. 1/pp. 612f.

41. The Report of the General Advisory Committee of the AEC, dated 30 October 1949, may be found in Herbert F. York, *The Advisors* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1976), pp. 151-159.

42. Brian McMahon, Letter to President Truman, 21 November 1949, FRUS/1949/v. 1/p. 591.

43. Letter to the author from John J. Hodge, Executive Assistant to the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense (Atomic Energy), 29 June 1977. This data is exempt from Freedom of Information Act release requirements.

44. Quester, pp. 4-9.

45. "Memorandum by Mr. Charles E. Bohlen to the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Nitze)," 5 April 1950, FRUS/1950/v. 1/p. 223.

46. NSC-68.

47. Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), p. 64.

48. Quester, p. 5.

49. Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Modern Military Records Division, National Archives, Washington, D.C. The number 400 in this memo is written in by hand in a black space of the typed copy, in contravention of President Truman's order that no such figure ever appear on paper. A handwritten note on this document, with an arrow pointing to the figure in the text, "figure |put?| in original and this copy only by Capt. Lulor, on advice of General Gruenther." Alfred Gruenther was Director of the Joint Staff of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

50. "Requirements for Initiation of Atomic Warfare," 7 July 1948, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Modern Military Records Division, National Archives, Washington, D.C., declassified 2 February 1978 and 30 March 1978. It is interesting that two copies of this memorandum are to be found in the National Archives files. In one (declassified 21 April 1978 and 30 June 1978) the number of bombs has been deleted, but the *name* of the bomb then under development (the Mark IV) remains. In the earlier declassified copy, the name of the bomb is deleted, but the number of weapons is not. From inspection of these and other documents on file at the Archives, it is clear that President Truman's classification directives were routinely violated by senior Defense Department officials.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 3d. The numbers quoted here (100 and 200) are not in either copy of Schlatter's memo, but are rather in a "1st endorsement" by Hoyt S. Vandenberg, Chief of Staff, USAF, to the Commanding General, Headquarters Strategic Air Command, dated 13 July 1948. Vandenberg noted in this memo that "our presently planned technical capability would seem to force us into executing two missions to accomplish what you would do in one."

52. In his memo to the Commanding General of SAC, Vandenberg noted that "with the development of the Mark IV, the number of specialists required on an assembly team should be considerably decreased, as should the total number of people required. Hence, it may transpire that one assembly team as presently constituted can be split to make as many as three teams for the assembly of the Mark IV," *ibid.*

53. "Memorandum by the Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Atomic Bomb Assembly Teams," 27 July 1948, revised 2 September 1948, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Modern Military Records Division, the National Archives, Washington, D.C., declassified 28 May 1976.

54. "Memo for Maj. Gen. Schlatter re Air Force Capability for Atomic Warfare," 12 January 1950, declassified 6 April 1978, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on file at the Modern Military Records Division, the National Archives, Washington, D.C. A recent account of this period paints a highly inaccurate picture. Anthony Cave Brown claims (with no reference cited) that ". . . America possessed at least 300 atomic bombs at the end of 1949 and had 840 strategic bombers in service with another 1,350 in mothballs . . . ." Anthony Cave Brown, ed., *Dropshot: The United States Plan for War with the Soviet Union in 1957* (New York: Dial Press, 1978), p. 18. The memo for Schlatter uotes: "Current capabilities are vested in 6 medium bomb wings and 4 heavy bomb wings. Three of the heavy bomb wings are not yet considered operational, due principally to insufficient equipment. All of the 6 medium bomb wings, although not completely equipped, have had some degree of operational experience by having engaged in maneuvers, field exercises, or test of facilities utilizing atomic bombs and supporting equipment . . . by 31 March 1950, it is anticipated that the totals will be approximately 82 B-29s, 169 B-50s, and 50 D-36s" |total 302|.

55. Thus General Advisory Committee member I.I. Rabi, testifyiug at the Oppenheimer security investigation several years later, coufessed: "I was astonished that it came that soon. I will tell you this was a peculiar kind of psychology. If you had asked anybody in 1944 or 1945 when would the Russians have it, it would have been 5 years. But every year that went by you kept on saying five years . . . ." U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1954), p. 467.

56. Ralph A. Ofstie, statement before the House Armed Services Committee, *The New York Times*, 12 October 1949, p. 34. For the best account of the late 1949 "revolt of the admirals," see Paul Y. Hammond, "Supercarriers and B-36 Bombers: Appropriations, Strategy, and Politics," in Harold Stein, ed., *American Civil-Military Decisions* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1963), pp. 465-568.

57. See Department of Defense, Semiannual Reports of the Secretary of Defense and of the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, 1 July to 31 December 1949; 1 January to 30 June 1950 (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off.)

58. Richard K. Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 12.

59. See Lawrence J. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

60. Hammond in Stein, pp. 299, 300.

61. John Lukacs, *1945: Year Zero* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978), pp. 76, 77.

62. Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs (Thorp) to the Secretary of State, 5 April 1950, FRUS/1950/v. 1/p. 219.

63. Memorandum by Mr. Hamilton Q. Dearborn of the Council of Economic Advisor to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Lay), 8 May 1950, FRUS/1950/v. 1/p. 311.

64. Memorandum by the Deputy Chief of the Division of Estimates, Bureau of the Budget (Schaub) to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Lay), 8 May 1950, FRUS/1950/v. 1/p. 305.

65. Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs (Barrett) to the Secretary of State, 6 April 1950, FRUS/1950/ v. 1/p. 225.

66. Record of the Meeting of the State-Defense Policy Review Group, Dept. of State, 16 March 1950, FRUS/1950/ v. 1/p. 201.

67. Ibid., FRUS/1950/v. 1/pp. 197, 198.

68. Draft Memorandum by the Counselor (Kennan) to the Secretary of State, 17 February 1950, FRUS/1950/v. 1/pp. 166, 167.

69. NSC 74, 10 July 1950, A Report to the National Security Council by the Under Secretary of State on A Plan for National Psychological Warfare, on file at the Modern Military Records Division, National Archives, Washington, D.C., declassified to 10 March 1977.

70. Record of the Eighth Meeting (1950) of the Policy Planning Staff of the Department of State, 2 February 1950, FRUS/1950/v. 1/p. 143.

71. Quincy Wright, "American Policy Toward Russia," *World Politics,* July 1950, p. 479.

72. Winston Churchill, it has recently been revealed, was less squeamish about brandishing nuclear weapons to U.S. political advantage. Upon imposition of the Berlin Blockade in April 1948 Churchill suggested to Prime Minister Attlee that Britain recommend to the Soviet Union that the blockade be withdrawn, on pain of U.S. atomic reprisal. The Prime Minister, and the American Ambassador, declined the advice. *The Washington Star,* 3 January 1979, p. A-5.

73. Paul R. Schulman, "Nonincremental Policy Making: Notes Toward an Alternative Paradigm," *American Political Science Review,* December 1975, p. 1368.

74. See Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1979), p. 2.

75. See *ibid.,* p. 3.

76. Levine, p. 127.